

The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

covenant (3:3, 6).³⁵ Barnett explains some of the dynamics of what Paul probably intends by stating that light has shown in the hearts of the redeemed:

“That darkness, according to v. 4, is attributable to the god of this world, who blinds the minds of unbelievers. This verse gives the answer to that; God—the true God, the creator and giver of light as opposed to the false god—illuminates the inner lives of those previously blinded by Satan. From the hitherto darkened heart of the apostle, in whom God had shone his light, now streams forth light for those who will hear the word of God—that Jesus Christ is Lord—from him. To them God shines in his light, dispelling the darkness of ignorance, fear, and guilt, removing the veil.”³⁶

Paul’s dramatic experience of salvation, in his encountering the Risen Yeshua and being blinded (Acts 9:1-19; cf. Galatians 1:13-17), certainly needs to be remembered for his statements here. Out of the darkness of Paul’s sin in once persecuting the Believers, shone forth not just the light of the Messiah, but the life of someone totally devoted to the Messiah’s service. Frequently, the pattern repeats itself when others come to saving faith in Yeshua: God shines His truth into darkness, and then out of a heart formerly darkened will shine forth the redemption of Yeshua. Seifrid connects this to various ongoing themes seen throughout Scripture, of how God acts in history to bring forth good from something once evil:

“It is ‘out of darkness’ that God causes light to shine: out of evil, God creates good; out of nothingness and death, God brings forth life. Paul thus...recalls the biblical tradition of the form and nature of God’s works: the Lord turns a rock into water (Ps 114:8), makes the wilderness a pool of water (Isa 41:18-19), turns mourning into dancing (Ps 30:11), turns sorrow into joy (John 16:20), out of death brings forth life (Rev 1:18)...[A]ccording to Paul’s word here, we cannot know God unless we know God as the Creator who performs these unfathomable, saving acts.”³⁷

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

“God Reconciling Through Messiah”

“Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Messiah and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Messiah reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Messiah, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Messiah, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Paul indicates the source of the new creation as being from God, and hence not a human source, seen in his word, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Messiah and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18, TLV).³⁸ It is not enough to simply be reconciled to the Father through the work of His Son, being made into a new creation; those like Paul and his associates have actually been *entrusted with the service* of God’s reconciliation.

Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:19 what the ministry of reconciliation is, “That is, in Messiah God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them; and He has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us” (TLV). As Psalm 32:2 says, “How

³⁵ Hafemann, Scott J. *NIV Application Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp 180-181.

³⁶ Barnett, 225.

³⁷ Seifrid, 201.

³⁸ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *2 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!”, something not just seen in the declarations of those like Paul in proclaiming the good news or gospel, but also as something that he has experienced (cf. Romans 4:6-8).

The text of 2 Corinthians 5:19 communicates that the Messiah was God’s agent in reconciling human beings to Him: *Theos ēn en Christō* (θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ), “God was in Messiah.” But does this *only* communicate that the Son is the Father’s agent? Harris makes the important point, especially when other passages are factored in, that more than just supernatural agency is witnessed in the statement “God was in Christ”:

“A functional christology presupposes, and finds its ultimate basis in, an ontological christology. Not only was Christ God’s agent in effecting reconciliation (Rom. 5:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:19-22); he also mediated the divine presence, thus giving validity to his reconciliatory sacrifice. God was in Christ and therefore acted through Christ (cf. John 14:10b, ‘the Father who dwells in me does his works’). Paul here alludes to Christ as the focus of divine revelation (‘God was in Christ’) and therefore as the means of divine redemption (‘reconciling the world to himself’; cf. v. 18). In the expression ‘God was in Christ’ there is also implied an identity between the redemptive action of Christ and that of God.”³⁹

While there might be some question about what it means for God in Messiah to be affecting reconciliation, given further Bible passages which detail the nature of Yeshua as no created agent—there is no doubt that when figures like Paul function as an agent of God, that he is created. Paul says of himself and his colleagues, “Therefore we are ambassadors of the Messiah; in effect, God is making his appeal through us. What we do is appeal on behalf of the Messiah, ‘Be reconciled to God!’” (CJB). It is worthwhile to consider how the verb for “reconcile,” *katalassō* (καταλλάσσω), is employed elsewhere to describe the activity of Moses (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.315). Some have taken Paul’s work as an ambassador of reconciliation for Messiah, as being purposefully contrasting with the work of Moses. Alternatively, we can better associate Paul’s work as a reconciler as standing in a continuity line of those in the service of the Lord, going back to figures such as Moses.

The reconciliation which is affected by trust in the Messiah, is something that has only come about because of the sacrifice of the Messiah for sin (John 1:29-34; Galatians 3:13; 1 John 3:5). In 2 Corinthians 5:21, it is stated, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (NIV). A parallel is easily witnessed in Romans 8:3 following: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.” The assertion of the Apostolic Writings is that Yeshua the Messiah never sinned by His own action or decision (Hebrews 4:15); the clause *hamartian epoiēsen* (ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν) is a causal action. Guthrie explains,

“[I]t should be emphasized that the third-person singular verb form ἐποίησεν (*epoiēsin*) points to God the Father’s initiative in assigning Christ the role of sin-bearer, even as we remember that Christ’s sacrificial death was an expression of Christ’s love (5:14). In other words, Father and Son are of one mind and purpose in the act that reconciles human beings to himself.”⁴⁰

There is, however, important discussion about Paul’s usage of *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία) the second time in 2 Corinthians 5:21, for sure, as Messianic versions such as the CJB/CJSB and TLV both have “sin offering.”⁴¹ This is not at all inappropriate, as Bruce indicates in his commentary how

³⁹ Harris, 443.

⁴⁰ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 314.

⁴¹ The New Jerusalem Bible has, “a victim for sin.”

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“this remarkable expression...can be best understood on the assumption that Paul had in mind the Hebrew idiom in which certain words for **sin** (*hattāṭ* [חַטָּאָת], ‘*āšām* [אָשָׂא]) mean not only **sin** but ‘sin-offering.’”⁴² Keener also indicates, “Paul may combine the notion of unblemished sacrifices with the scapegoat that came to represent or embody Israel’s sin (Lev 1:3; 16:21-22).”⁴³ While a bit technical, and while broadly referring to the Greek Septuagint translation of various Tanach passages, Harris appropriately compiles the evidence in favor of the “sin offering” reading for the second usage of *hamartia* in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

“The OT background for this interpretation may be found in Leviticus 4 with its instruction concerning the sin offering; for in Isaiah 53 which speaks of Yahweh’s making his servant’s life a sin offering (*‘āšām*; LXX, ἐὰν δώτε περὶ ἁμαρτίας [*ean dōte peri hamartias*] (v. 10), and affirms that ‘Yahweh laid on him [his servant] the iniquity of us all’ (LXX, καὶ κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν [*kai Kurios paredōken auton tais hamartiais hēmōn*]) (v. 6); or in the Day of Atonement drama of Leviticus 16:5-10, 20-22, where the scapegoat is driven into the desert, carrying on its head ‘all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins’ (v. 21).”⁴⁴

Many connections are made between “He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:21, TLV), and statements appearing in Isaiah 53:

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him...As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it* and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12).

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Messiah also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH [Isaiah 53:9]; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:21-24).

2 Corinthians 8:9

“Yeshua Became Poor”

“For you know the grace of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

The importance of the Corinthians being generous in their provision to Paul’s Jerusalem collection (2 Corinthians 8:1-8), is not just a matter of the First Century Believers standing in solidarity with one another, and supporting one another.⁴⁵ Being generous with one’s resources, and performing actions reflective of the example of Yeshua the Messiah, is imperative as it indicates that someone is truly accomplishing the good works incumbent upon the born

⁴² Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 210.

⁴³ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 187.

⁴⁴ Harris, 452.

⁴⁵ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *2 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.